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Pragmatic Approach to Conflict Talk between Couples in *Desperate Housewives*

《疯狂主妇》中夫妻间冲突话语的语用分析

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Synopsis

The terms used for conflict talk can denote narrow sense — a type of speech act, for instance: disagreeing, opposing, and arguing; or broad sense — a type of interaction: the adversative episode, oppositional argument, quarrel, and disputes. The terms have one core common feature, that is, one participant is disagreeing with another participant when they have different interests or opinions. Researches on conflict talk have been extensively done in numerous fields, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, linguistics and so on, but pragmatic researches on the conflict talk are rather limited and there are even fewer pragmatic researches on the conflict talk between couples in literature. Since there isn't sufficient research on the speech act of conflict talk between couples, this paper intends to contribute to fill this gap with a careful study on the conflict talk between couples based on quantitative and qualitative analysis mainly focusing on the pragmatic strategies involved. The study is carried out in the following two parts.

The previous two chapters construct a theoretical framework for analyzing conflict talk between couples. After briefing the definition of the conflict talk, Chapter one presents a review of previous studies on conflict talk and conflict talk between couples. Chapter two lays down the theoretical framework of the study, on the basis of speech act theory, conversation analysis and politeness theory.

The second part consists of Chapter three, Chapter four and Chapter five, which are devoted to the analysis of the conflict talk between couples. Chapter Three introduces the research methodology and data collection. The television series, *Desperate Housewives* are chosen to build up a corpus with 152 conflict episodes between couples. Chapter four carries out the quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Pragmatic strategies used by the couples are identified with their frequency computed. Chapter five discusses the results of the data analysis. In the conflict talk between

couples, the husband and wife employ similar strategies of initiating conflict talks and terminating them as well. But they differ in the frequency of using certain kinds of the strategies. The strategy of counterclaim which easily escalates confrontations is the most frequently used by the husbands and wives. The wives use more strategies of Non-FTA to terminate their arguments. These similarities and differences are further illustrated from the perspective of gender.

Being the first pragmatic study of the conflict talk between couples on quantitative and qualitative analysis, the present study supplements the existing studies to some extent, but still calls for further research.

Key words: speech act, conflict talk between couples, conversation analysis; politeness theory, English television series

摘要

冲突话语是个很笼统的概念,狭义上可指一种言语行为,如:不赞同(disagreeing),反对(opposing)和争执(arguing),广义上可指一种言语事件,如:冲突性话语(adversative episode),争执性话语(oppositional argument),争吵(quarrel)和反驳(disputing)等。无论采取何种概念,冲突都有一个共同的特征,即:一方话语与另一方话语发生冲突,这种冲突表现为交际的一方反对另一方的立场或对方的观点,继而产生话语冲突。研究者对冲突话语做了大量和广泛的调查,主要是在人类学,社会学,心理学,语言学等领域,但是从语用学角度考察冲突话语的文章很少,从语用学角度考察夫妻间冲突话语的文章就更少。针对夫妻冲突话语研究的不足,本文采用定量和定性的方法,对夫妻冲突话语进行分析,主要探讨夫妻间冲突话语涉及的语用策略及其功能。本文的中心论述分为两大部分。

第一部分为论文的前两章,主要探讨夫妻冲突话语言语行为的理论框架。第一章首先讨论冲突话语言语行为的定义,进而回顾并评论冲突话语和夫妻间冲突话语的研究成果。第二章阐释了全文的理论基础,包括言语行为理论,会话分析和礼貌理论,并在此基础上搭建了研究的理论框架。

第二部分包括论文的后三章,具体展开对英文电视剧中夫妻冲突话语的分析。第三章描述了研究方法和语料的收集。本文选取了美国电视剧《疯狂主妇》作为语料来源,从中收集并建立了包括152个夫妻冲突话语言语行为在内的语料库。第四章对所收集的语料进行定量和定性分析,界定了冲突话语中夫妻采取的语用策略,并计算了各种语用策略出现的频率。第五章提出数据分析的结果。夫妻在冲突话语中都使用了相似的冲突策略和结束策略,但在特定策略的使用频率上有所不同。在冲突中夫妻大量采用的反申明式(counterclaim)极易使冲突升级;在结束冲突时,妻子使用不威胁双方面子的策略,如退出(withdrawal)和转换话题(focus-shifting)的频率比丈夫高。夫妻话语冲突的相同点和不同点本文将从性别差异的角度进行阐释。

本文首次从语用学的角度对夫妻冲突话语进行定量和定性分析,在一定程度

上补充和丰富了现存的言语行为研究。当然，夫妻冲突话语的发生涉及多方面因素，还需要更多和进一步的探讨。

关键词：言语行为；夫妻间冲突话语；会话分析；礼貌理论；英文电视剧

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Introduction

The present thesis intends to provide a pragmatic analysis of the speech act of conflict talk between couples in English television series. This chapter presents the rationale and objectives of the present research, briefly illustrates the methodology and outlines the overall structure of the thesis.

1. The Rationale of the Study

Conflict is a common phenomenon in interactions between individuals or between groups. It can be defined as a relationship when two people have incompatible goals and use a variety of prosocial and antisocial strategies to influence each other's behavior (Malloy & McMurray, 1996: 185). In our work, we might have conflict with our colleagues and superiors. In our personal lives we might have conflict with our friends and family members. When two people have different values, goals, or desires, conflict may occur. It is a feature of everyday life, and a source of drama in literature. In recent years, conflict talk has been much talked about among researchers in the field of linguistics, and there are lots of studies of conflict talk on verbal disputes among children. Peer group conflicts among children offer a significant resource for the development of interactional and social competencies of children (Hutchby & Drew, 1991). Corsaro and Rizzo (1990) compared disputatious talk among nursery school children in Italy and the U.S.

Conflict is a common occurrence among couples; no couple agrees on everything or gets along with one another 100% of the time. Because even though they have developed a great deal of shared intimacy and interdependence, still their interests might vary enormously, they might not see eye to eye with each other on lots of different issues, such as feelings, values, desires, goals and pride. Some researchers say there are five top reasons for marital conflict: a failure of communication, financial

difficulties, sexual difficulties, problems with in-laws, and disagreements over child rearing (Schaefer, 2007).

Conflict can either destroy a marriage or make it stronger; it all depends on how you view it and how you choose to deal with it. When we use destructive approaches it does not help to build or strengthen the relationship; when couples use constructive approaches to successfully work through conflict, their relationship grows stronger and they have an increased sense of confidence that they can work through future difficulties.

With the increasing rate of the divorce in recent years, the destructive effect of conflict between couples on family should not be ignored. So there is an urgent need to study the conflict talk between couples. We hope that the study of the linguistic phenomenon will facilitate our understanding of the conflict talk and shed some light on what aspects that deserve close attention of couples for the avoidance of conflict and for the solution of it, as well.

Up till now, few studies of conflict between couples from pragmatic perspective have ever been conducted. It is here believed that a pragmatic research into this phenomenon will definitely broaden the research coverage of it and deepen our understanding of this particular linguistic phenomenon.

2. The Objectives of the Study

The major focus of the present study is to utilize the findings proposed in the existing studies so as to offer a more thorough apprehension of conflict talk between couples.

Firstly, the present study attempts to enrich the speech act researches. Inspired by speech act theory, a large number of researchers have conducted investigations of many speech acts for linguistic models and external factors that can affect utterance. However, little research has been carried out on the speech act of conflict between couples on pragmatic perspective, so it remains under-explored. The present study is

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